

VZCZCXRO3976
RR RUEHBC RUEHDA RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHC #0227/01 3461705
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 111658Z DEC 08
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 3062
INFO IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC 1714
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 STATE 130227

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [ECON](#) [ECIN](#) [EAID](#) [SOCI](#) [OEXC](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: IRAQ ECONOMIC RECOVERY: ROLE OF SCIENCE &
TECHNOLOGY (ROUNDTABLE REPORT)

REF: (A) BAGHDAD 2769 (B) BAGHDAD 3455

1. (U) Summary: To accelerate Iraq's economic recovery, a roundtable of U.S. experts, convened by the Department, has offered to help Iraq establish and develop its own National Science Foundation (NSF). Science and technology (the application of science) has long been a vital engine of economic development but has not been leveraged in Iraq's economic recovery. The roundtable of science and technology (S&T) experts identified eight ways that an Iraqi version of an NSF can contribute to Iraq's economic recovery, as well as to the objectives of the Strategic Framework Agreement and the International Compact with Iraq (see paragraph 7). However, before the S&T roundtable can provide further assistance, it requires more information from the Government of Iraq (GOI) (see paragraph 9). End Summary.

The GOI Intends to Leverage S&T in Iraq's Economic Recovery

2. (U) On September 1, the Iraqi Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to evaluate and recommend improvements to Iraq's S&T capabilities and policies, so they can better support economic development (reftel A). On September 15, the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR) announced the GOI's intent to establish and fund an independent scientific research authority (SRA) to, among other things, (a) evaluate and recommend improvements to Iraq's S&T capabilities, policies, and practices; (b) promote and fund S&T research; and (c) oversee university S&T centers. These announcements are complementary and - along with other recent GOI actions such as the proposed law to increase compensation and incentives for top scientists - demonstrate the GOI's intent to leverage S&T in Iraq's economic recovery.

The Department Is Preparing to Assist the GOI: STIP Review

3. (SBU) The UNCTAD MOU commissions a Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy (STIP) Review for Iraq. The Department, through the Office of the Science and Technology Adviser to the Secretary, intends to place at least one representative on the STIP Review team.

The Department Is Preparing to Assist the GOI: Roundtable

4. (SBU) Since the GOI's concept of an SRA appears similar in structure and function to the U.S. National Science Foundation, which has long been an important contributor to U.S. economic growth, the Department convened a roundtable of S&T experts on November 20 to develop a recommendation for how the U.S. government (USG) and the U.S. S&T community

might assist the GOI in establishing an SRA, modeled on the U.S. National Science Foundation but unique to Iraq's culture, governmental structure, and current economic developmental needs. The roundtable was composed of one or more representatives from the following organizations, with all the representatives having experience in S&T in Iraq:

-- Department of State: Office of the Science and Technology Adviser to the Secretary of State, Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs's Office of Science and Technology Cooperation, Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation's Science Center Programs, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs's Office of Iraq Affairs

-- Department of Defense: International Technology Programs Office, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

-- Non-USG: National Science Foundation, National Academy of Sciences, American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Association of Engineering Societies, U.S. Civilian Research and Development Foundation, Texas Tech University

. . . S&T Is Vital to, but Underutilized in, Iraq's Recovery

STATE 00130227 002 OF 003

15. (U) Roundtable participants agreed that S&T research and commercialization is a vital engine of economic development in countries around the world, but lamented that S&T has not been leveraged in Iraq's economic recovery. They discussed the dire condition of Iraqi S&T: (a) scientists and engineers have been targeted and killed, (b) many have fled Iraq for safer locations, (c) the S&T community that remains in Iraq is fragmented, (d) both the Iraqi S&T communities dispersed outside Iraq and fragmented inside Iraq are isolated from essential communication and collaboration with other Iraqis and the international S&T community, (e) many S&T research or educational facilities and much S&T infrastructure are antiquated or destroyed, and (f) key S&T research or educational funding has been eliminated. Consequently, Iraqi S&T may be 20 or more years behind global state of the art and Iraqi scientists and engineers, especially those in the private sector, have been unable to make sufficient contribution to Iraq's economic recovery.

. . . Window of Opportunity to Employ S&T in Iraq's Recovery

16. (U) Roundtable participants considered the improving situation in Iraq: As security, governance, essential services, and economic conditions improve, Iraqi scientists and engineers are now needed even more for the next stage of Iraq's economic recovery. And these improving conditions have created a window of opportunity: (a) Iraqi scientists and engineers are beginning to stay in or return to Iraq and reconnect with each other; (b) the GOI can now focus more on initiatives not directly related to immediate problems with security, governance, and essential services; (c) the GOI is more ready and able to fund S&T initiatives; and (d) U.S. S&T institutions and companies that can contribute to S&T initiatives are more able to work in Iraq.

. . . Through Iraqi Version of a National Science Foundation

17. (SBU) Roundtable participants identified the following benefits to Iraq that an SRA could provide and that the U.S. S&T community could support with appropriate advice and assistance. These benefits could help achieve objectives in both the Strategic Framework Agreement with Iraq (SFA) and the International Compact with Iraq (ICI); the benefits are linked below to each document. (Note: None of the eight items in the following list are actual terms or conditions in

the SFA or ICI, and none of these items would be funded by the USG. Each of these items could, however, help achieve the general intent of the referenced clause in the SFA or ICI.)

-- Iraqi facilitating and funding of S&T research and encouraging commercialization of that research - to fuel Iraq's education and economic recovery (SFA IV.2, V.10)

-- Providing incentives for scientists and engineers not to flee Iraq and for those who have fled to return - to contribute to Iraq's education and economic recovery (ICI 4.4.1)

-- Engaging Iraq's private-sector S&T expertise, a mostly untapped resource, in Iraq's economic recovery (ICI 4.2.1)

-- Alleviating insufficient Iraqi ministerial capacity needed to exploit S&T in Iraq's economic recovery and providing a forum for improving cooperation between Iraqi ministries, between the Iraqi central and provincial governments, and between the Iraqi central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (SFA V.5)

-- Bridging ethno-sectarian divides that have hampered other U.S. initiatives during Iraq's reconstruction, since S&T activities are normally apolitical and cross-cultural - thereby promoting social stability (ICI 3.1.1)

-- Equipping of university S&T research centers by the GOI; funding of advanced research by the GOI; and facilitating faculty and student S&T collaboration, partnerships, and exchanges between Iraqi universities and between U.S. and Iraqi universities - to modernize and rejuvenate Iraqi higher education and develop Iraq's human capital (SFA IV.2, IV.3; ICI 4.4.1) (see reftel B for complementary Post initiatives)

-- Engaging the global community, especially Arab countries, in Iraq's economic recovery through S&T collaboration and direct investment (SFA V.5, V.7; ICI 4.3.4)

STATE 00130227 003 OF 003

-- Accelerating redirection of Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) experts into activities that contribute to Iraq's economic recovery - reducing national security risks for the United States and its allies and terrorism risks in Iraq (SFA III, ICI 3.1.1)

Should We Exploit This Window of Opportunity?

18. (U) S&T roundtable participants offered to (a) re-convene as needed to continue to offer advice on U.S. S&T engagement in Iraq and (b) assemble a small team of S&T experts, from the organizations represented at the roundtable and from the broader U.S. S&T community, to make one or more trips to Iraq to assist the GOI in establishing and developing an SRA. The roundtable participants agreed, however, that before they could be of any further value, they needed more detailed information on the GOI's desires, intents, and priorities.

19. (SBU) Comment: The U.S. S&T community is prepared to help the GOI establish an SRA, but the community needs more information on the GOI's desires, intents, and priorities related to assistance in establishing an SRA. Post's dialogue with the GOI could yield better understanding of how to use U.S. S&T engagement in Iraq's economic recovery and in development of an SRA. The Department is prepared to assist Post in establishing this dialogue by sending an S&T community representative to consult with the GOI on how the community can best assist Iraq. NEA/I-EAA officer Jeff O'Neal will consult with Post on the desirability and timing of such a visit. End Comment.
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